

Learning to Lunge – Ivory Part 1

By Marie Hoffman

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Ivory was a black with a blaze and four white socks, two year old Appendix Quarter horse filly that was purchased by Denise as a long yearling. Ivory has a flat profile, wide set fluted ears, big jowl, slightly sloping muzzle and a very distinct heart shaped upper lip. Her head shape indicates she is intelligent, curious and does ask questions about what she is being asked to do. I found that her personality fit what her head shape indicated.

Denise had never raised or trained a young horse, though she has another horse and did have some horse experience.

We started Ivory in the basic T.T.E.A.M. leading positions of Dingo and Elegant Elephant. The Dingo is where you stand at the throatlatch area of the horse. The lead chain strap is in your hand furthest away from the horse. The other hand is holding the wand (a four foot stiff white whip). To ask the horse to move forward Denise stroked her back several times. This tells the horse to wait. Then Denise lightly tapped the croup with circular motions with the end of the wand. At the same time as she was giving Ivory the cue on the croup to move forward, Denise clucked and signaled with the chain (tug and release) to move forward.

This way Ivory had three ways to understand what was being asked: verbal, feel, and sight (the person walking) are all used at the same time to help the horse to understand what is being asked. Ivory did not move forward right away from the cue on the croup. It took all three ways to cue her to help her understand at first. As the lesson continued, the cue on the croup was given a couple of seconds before the other cues of voice and lead. Steadily she understood that the tap on the croup meant go forward.

Once Ivory was moving forward from the signal on the croup and walking, Denise had to move her hands so she held the end of the lead and the wand in her hand farthest from Ivory and held on to the lead about 5 or 6 inches from the side ring of the halter. The wand is positioned so the button end is toward the horse's nose, but carried two or three feet in front of the horse. Now Denise was in a position to signal Ivory to stop in the Elegant Elephant. She did this by using her voice saying "and whoaaa". Denise had to be reminded to keep walking and not to stop her feet until Ivory actually stopped her hooves. If she stopped before Ivory, then Ivory would circle around her and not stop. With the wand, Denise firmly and slowly (like pulling the wand through water) moved the wand down and toward Ivory's opposite point of shoulder. She did this while signaling lightly with the hand on the chain lead for Ivory to stop and saying whoa.

Once they had the leading basics down of go forward with a cue on the croup and stopping, we were ready to learn the next step. The name of this step is called Dolphins Flickering through the Waves. This is the T.T.E.A.M. step to teach the horse to lead at a distance from the handler as they are working toward lunging. It is where the handler holds the lead and wand in the same position as the Dingo and lunging. The wand is used on the horse's croup to tap to go forward then taps on the withers, continuing to tap a few inches behind the poll on the neck and if needed on the chain or the side of the horse's muzzle. Then the wand is moved back toward the croup repeating the sequence. If the horse is staying away at the desired distance the wand does not touch the horse. Both horse and handler move in straight lines and very shallow curves. When teaching the horse this leading position, I explained to Denise that it was important that the leader move away from the horse to create the distance. The leader does not push the horse away from them, when first learning this position.

Ivory was not very confident when being asked to lead at a distance. This is very common with young or inexperienced horse. They prefer to be right next to you or even in your boots! Denise had to work at keeping her away from her by being very active with the wand. She did not hit Ivory hard at any time; she just made it uncomfortable to come toward the moving and tapping wand. At the same time Denise had to work at not drifting closer to Ivory as they moved together. This would cause Ivory to look like she was moving closer to Denise when it was actually Denise moving toward Ivory.

It took a few sessions before Ivory had developed enough confidence to stay away from Denise and Denise became comfortable with handling Ivory at a distance. I had Denise work on both sides of Ivory to train both sides of the horse.

To help learn to keep their distance from each other, I had them lead in the Dolphins Flickering through the Waves over poles laid in a row. This helped Denise focus on the distance between them.

Once they were able to navigate the poles. Now it was time to learn how to trot in hand. I had Denise go into the Dingo position and using the wand ask Ivory to trot along with verbal signals and signals on the chain. Ivory picked this up quickly.

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She trotted easily from the three signals. She wanted to trot off and play though. Denise had to go quickly into the Elegant Elephant to signal Ivory to stop. Ivory was big well over 15 hands and her trot was long strided. Denise did well, though it was a bit of a challenge.

I had Denise work to make the trotting distances short, so Ivory did not have a chance to get too fast or far ahead and want to play. This worked well and Ivory was learning that playing was not acceptable.

The next week at their lesson they were doing great. Now it was time to learn to actually lunge. Using a separate 30 inch chain, we put it on in the normal leading position, but instead of hooking the chain up the side of the halter, we brought the snap down to hook to the chain under the chin. The chain needed to be loose enough to not put pressure on the nose and tight enough not to slip over the chin if pulled straight forward. The chain was still looped over the nose band of the halter so it would not slide down when it did not have pressure on it. We attached a lunge line to the triangle stirrup of the chain.

I had Denise go into the position of Dolphins Flickering through the Waves. Only while walking, I had Denise move away from her and ask Ivory to go like they were in that leading position. I reminded Denise that at a lead shank's distance from the horse is the perfect position to receive the full blow should a horse decide to turn and kick. She needed to be close or far enough away not to be in danger.

Once they were moving forward I had Denise slow her feet and cause Ivory to circle around her. Ivory did well. We repeated the same exercise the other direction. It took a little more effort on Denise's part to keep Ivory out. Denise used the wand in the same manner as the Dolphins Flickering through the Waves to keep Ivory out. They were still having trouble.

I explained to Denise that she was walking backwards with her feet drawing Ivory toward her. Denise started doing this to get away from Ivory by moving back to get a better position. This only makes it more difficult because this movement draws the horse's head toward you as it was doing in Ivory's case until Ivory was facing Denise.

I had Denise stop Ivory. I started them by positioning Denise at Ivory's flank. Then I reminded Denise to be sure she kept walking forward as she signaled Ivory to move off. As long as Denise moved her feet in a forward motion Ivory stayed moving away from Denise. I suggested that it is like driving your horse in a circle. Keep focused on the horse's hip or flank. The lead will keep the horse in a circle.

Denise and Ivory were now moving forward but Denise was covering as much distance in the circle as Ivory was. I had them stop and I drew a circle in the sand of the arena for Denise to stand in. She got Ivory started and then I had her keep her feet inside the circle while moving them forward. Ivory was now lunging nicely around Denise. I had the both of them repeat the same exercise the other way. It was much easier the other direction which was the horse's left.

Though neither horse nor handler was perfect at first, they were able to end each session with a few rounds of Ivory lunging around Denise correctly at the walk. Soon they were doing well quitting each session right after Ivory did all she was asked while lunging. Denise remembered that it is important to keep the lessons short and if the horse does everything correct don't keep repeating it. The horse may think he did something wrong and will change what he is doing. Then the handler has to start over and teach the horse again.

The trot was the next step and that was easy. Ivory already understood the cues to trot while lead so she understood when signaled with the voice and whip to move into a trot while lunged. She still wanted to take off and play at times. I had Denise, at first, stop her telling her to whoa while giving a strong signal on the line. Then start her up again. After a few sessions, if Ivory started to play then Denise used a firm voice and a firm tug on the line, but only enough to get the correct response from Ivory.

If Ivory took off bolting or started bucking, Denise firmly stopped her and verbally letting her know that that was not appropriate behavior. Then Denise would calmly, as if nothing had happened, start Ivory up again. If she tried to whirl and go the other direction Denise used the line to make sure Ivory was still looking at her with the same eye. If lunging to the left and Ivory turned to face Denise, Denise made sure she was on the left side of Ivory's head before sending her back out to lunge again. This usually only happened when Ivory wanted to play and Denise had to reprimand her by a firm tug on the

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chain. Sometimes she would turn and face Denise. Ivory understood to keep her distance from Denise from the Dolphins leading exercise, so Denise only needed to use the whip toward Ivory's neck and nose to remind her to keep her distance. A few times Denise did need to tap Ivory on the neck and muzzle if Ivory ignored the cues at a distance. Ivory then moved promptly back to her position and went around Denise.

Once Ivory learned to lunge at the walk, trot and then to stop. The next step was to trot long and then slow the trot. It did not take long before Ivory understood the vibrating signal on the line and easy meant she was to slow and a cluck and trrrroooott meant to speed up. Keeping our lessons in mind Denise worked on lunging Ivory a few times a month. She worked on Ivory's ground driving along with leading her around the neighborhood the rest of the time.

As Ivory was only a two year old and it is harmful to lunge a young horse much. I had Denise lunging only at the walk and trot. We used lunging only to further the education of the horse. Lunging should be done very sparingly on a young horse. Cantering on the lunge was not done until the fall of Ivory's two year old year. Then it too was used sparingly, only enough for Ivory to understand.